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Iowa Department of Education

Commission on Educator Leadership and  
Compensation: Annual Report

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## **Introduction**

Division VII of House File 215 established the Commission on Educator Leadership and Compensation (Commission). The Legislature charged the Commission with three primary responsibilities:

- 1) Monitor the implementation of Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) system.
- 2) Evaluate and make recommendations to the Department of Education (Department) on school districts' applications for approval of teacher leadership plans and on the expenditure of money appropriated for the development of Iowa's TLC system.
- 3) Review the use and effectiveness of the funds distributed to school districts for supplemental assistance to high-need schools.

In addition to these primary responsibilities, the Commission is also required to submit its findings and any recommendations for changes to Iowa's TLC system and the state supplemental assistance to high-need schools program in a report to the Director of the Iowa Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the Governor, and the General Assembly by December 15 annually. Because FY 2015 is the first year of implementation of the TLC system and supplemental assistance to high-need schools programs will not be implemented until FY 2016 at the earliest, the Commission will use this report as an opportunity to share some of the recommendations and findings it has shared with the Department during its meetings over the past year. This feedback can be categorized into three groups: strengths of the TLC system; challenges and concerns; and needs and recommendations.

## **Commission Feedback, Findings and Recommendations**

### **Strengths of the TLC System**

Commission members shared the following themes related to the positive development of the TLC system over the past year.

- While still very new, educators overall have a very positive attitude toward TLC. It is viewed as an opportunity to increase capacity and as a strong statement about valuing and supporting teachers.
- Time for extended planning with ample examples and resources in year two has been helpful. The Department and the area education agency (AEA) system have worked together to provide significant support and resources for both planning and implementation.

- School districts that have implemented plans in the first year have instituted very rigorous selection processes for teacher leaders, which is an important component of the TLC system. In some districts, however, the process has been viewed as a "hoop" and in others it may have limited the number of teachers in leadership roles.
- Initial concerns some educators had about how teachers who were not in formally designated leadership roles would respond have largely not materialized in districts implementing TLC plans this year.
- The legislation's provision to allow for flexibility in choice of plans has been welcomed, and most districts have chosen model 3 (the comparable plan option).

### **Challenges and Concerns**

Commission members have also shared challenges they've heard and experienced during the early implementation stage.

- The primary concerns voiced by Commission members have focused on small school districts and have included:
  - Not as many small districts were selected in the first round of the process.
  - It is potentially becoming more difficult to hire teachers as neighboring big districts hire significant numbers of new teachers to backfill teaching positions that were created when teachers took on leadership roles.
  - In some rural districts, it is a challenge to meet the minimum salary requirement of \$33,500, which leaves limited resources to implement the other required components of the plan.
  - Some small schools are struggling to see how they can make the system work in their context. For example, with small numbers of students the funding stream is minimal, which presents the question of whether or not it is worth the time and effort to develop a local plan.
- Commission members have heard questions related to the sustainability of funding for TLC. Many of these concerns, however, are simply misperceptions and are based on a lack of understanding that the TLC funding rolls into districts' funding as a categorical funding stream after the first year of implementation.
- Some Commission members have heard concern that TLC takes the best teachers out of classrooms. While the Commission believes TLC strengthens instruction by enlarging the impact of great teachers, the perception among some parents remains that the best teachers are leaving the classroom.

- The process of moving from planning to implementation presents challenges. For example, the timeline for districts implementing a plan in year one was incredibly tight (though for year two the timeline was adjusted to allow districts more time for implementation).
- TLC changes the role of the principal, in many ways for the better, but at the same time it can present additional time commitments for school leaders.
- Finally, some districts have expressed concern that the requirement for teacher leaders to have three years of teaching experience and one year of experience in the district to be eligible for a leadership role is too restrictive. The Commission, however, discussed this issue at length and is not recommending changes to this requirement as most Commission members believe this rule is well-intentioned and serves an important purpose. They mention that it prevents the “poaching” of teachers by districts that can pay more for leadership roles, helps build local capacity, and ensures teacher leaders have the credibility among their peers that they need to be successful. Other Commission members also expressed an interest in continuing to explore ways to ensure that all schools, especially small ones, have the ability to fill each of their leadership positions.

### **Needs and Recommendations**

Commission members also provided suggestions for how the State can ensure effective planning and implementation of TLC moving forward.

- A thorough evaluation, along with clear evaluation criteria, will be essential to ensure the sustainability and success of TLC. The criteria for success must not be nebulous, and districts should receive explicit guidance on the accountability system.
- The State must ensure cohesion among all initiatives at both the state and district level.
- There is continued need for additional resources for the support of implementation. Teacher leaders, building principals, district administrators and teachers not in formally designated leadership roles all need significant training and support to ensure the effective implementation of local TLC plans.
- There is a need for sharing best practices and examples among implementing districts.
- TLC remains in the early stages of implementation. While, so far, the system is off to a strong start, there is a need to continue to improve the system. One Commission member stated that it is too early to declare victory; this is an ongoing change process and we must take a systems-thinking approach to ensure that we meet the needs of all stakeholders.

- Finally, the Commission vigorously discussed the funding of the TLC system. Commission members debated the possibility of requesting additional resources to expand the number of districts in year two so that all districts meeting the cut score would have their plans approved. The concern among many Commission members, however, is that adding more resources to TLC could potentially have unintended consequences such as reducing the available funding for supplemental state aid and other needed education initiatives. In addition to the implications of “front-loading” TLC funds, other Commission members raised the point that TLC funding, regardless of the year in which it is distributed, potentially draws resources away from other priorities.

## **Conclusion**

Since beginning their work in August 2013, Commission members have come together to guide a successful beginning to the development of the TLC system. The Commission’s primary focus has been the development and implementation of a process for the evaluation of school districts’ teacher leadership and compensation plans. The Commission will then begin to shift its focus to the other areas of responsibility given to it by the General Assembly in Division VII of House File 215. In its relatively brief existence, the Commission has come together to fulfill its obligations and to provide input from stakeholders on how this system can help strengthen teaching and learning throughout Iowa.

## Appendix

### Names and Affiliations of Commission Members:

Jeff Anderson	Boone	School Board Member
Lisa Bartusek	Des Moines	Executive Director, Iowa Association of School Boards
Mike Beranek	West Des Moines	Teacher
Molly Boyle	Waukee	Teacher
Mary Jane Cobb	Des Moines	Executive Director, Iowa State Education Association
Kevin Ericson	Nevada	Teacher
Ray Feuss	Cedar Rapids	Teacher
Patti Fields	Iowa City	School Board Member
Brenda Garcia	Muscatine	Parent
Paul Gausman	Sioux City	Superintendent
Mary Jo Hainstock	Vinton-Shellsburg	Superintendent
Donna Huston	Twin Cedars	Teacher
Jeff Orvis	Waverly – Shell Rock	Teacher
Diane Pratt	Ft. Dodge	Teacher
Victoria Robinson	Cedar Falls	Professor, University of Northern Iowa
Dan Smith	Clive	Executive Director, School Administrators of Iowa
Georgia Van Gundy	Des Moines	Principal Financial
Paula Vincent	Johnston	Chief Administrator, Heartland AEA
Denny Wulf	Norwalk	Superintendent
Ryan Wise (ex-officio)	Des Moines	Iowa Department of Education
Peter Ansingh (facilitator)	Des Moines	Iowa Department of Education